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GEORGE BUSH

**Proclamation 6398 of December 23, 1991**

### **National Ellis Island Day, 1992**

*By the President of the United States of America  
A Proclamation*

The ethnic diversity that we so proudly celebrate in the United States mirrors our rich heritage as a Nation of immigrants. "Here is not merely a Nation," wrote Walt Whitman, "but a teeming nation of nations . . . Here is the hospitality which forever indicates heroes." One of the greatest symbols of American hospitality stands at Ellis Island in Upper New York Bay.

A century ago, on January 1, 1892, the immigrant station on Ellis Island was opened as a gateway to America. Between 1892 and 1954, nearly 17 million immigrants entered the United States through this portal. Many sought refuge from tyranny and persecution. All sought new lives in this great land of freedom and opportunity.

At Ellis Island, millions of immigrants from around the world were able to look across the Bay toward our magnificent Statue of Liberty, the famed "Mother of Exiles" who lifts her lamp "beside the golden door." During the mass wave of immigration that spanned from 1900 to 1914, they came, especially immigrants from throughout Southern and Eastern Europe. Indeed, 100 million Americans, some 40 percent of our population, can trace their ancestry through Ellis Island.

The course of immigration to this country has fluctuated throughout the history of the United States. Recent years, for example, have seen increased numbers of immigrants of Hispanic and Asian origin. But whatever their place of origin or point of entry, each generation of immigrants has bettered America.

Indeed, it is fitting that the restoration of Ellis Island has constituted the largest historic renovation project in the history of the United States. After all, immigration has been one of the largest single factors in our Nation's social, cultural, and economic development. Walt Whitman aptly noted that, in the eyes of the poet, "the other continents arrive as contributions . . . he gives them reception for their sake and for his own sake." That has always been true, for immigrants have enriched the United States beyond measure, bringing many contributions to our society along with the unique customs and traditions of their ancestral homeland. Most important, they have shared eagerly in the hard work of freedom, helping to defend the ideals of liberty and self-government and helping to build our churches, schools, factories, farms, and railroads.

Visiting Ellis Island today or seeing pictures of this place evokes strong chords in our national memory—the relief immigrants felt upon landing, the strangeness of new surroundings, the babble of languages, the pain

of separation from family and friends remaining in the Old World, the despair felt by those few who were not admitted and forced to return to their countries. Whatever our personal histories, who does not recall the pictures—a woman in a head scarf holding a wide-eyed child, a man burdened with his belongings and tools of his trade, a 45-star flag perched above a full waiting room of anxious people—and not felt a breath of recognition; a twinge of silent pain; or, most of all, a feeling of gratitude that our ancestors chose to live or remain in this, the freest, greatest country on Earth?

America's history has long been a story of immigrants, and today Ellis Island stands as a glorious reminder that new chapters are being added to that narrative each day. Thus, as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of this historic place, evocative symbol of so much of our Nation's heritage, let us not only salute the many generous contributors who made its renovation possible but also offer a warm welcome to the immigrants of today—our fellow Americans of tomorrow.

The Congress, by Public Law 102-177, has designated January 1, 1992, as "National Ellis Island Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim January 1, 1992, as National Ellis Island Day. I invite all Americans to observe this day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-third day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and sixteenth.

GEORGE BUSH